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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

On Monday, all media bannered the deadly tsunami that hit South Asian coasts on Sunday, saying that dozens of Israelis in the area are unaccounted for, especially in southern Thailand, India, and Sri Lanka. Israel Radio cited the Foreign Ministry as saying that some 500 Israelis known to have been in the affected areas still have not called home. Leading media reported that, responding to a call by Sri Lanka's President to the international community, Israel has dispatched a medical team to that country.

On Sunday, Maariv reported that the isolated Gaza Strip settlement of Netzarim will be evacuated first. Leading media quoted Yonatan Bassi, the head of the Disengagement Administration, as confirming Sunday that all 20 families from the Pe'at Sadeh settlement in the Gaza Strip will relocate to Moshav Mavki'im south of Ashkelon by May 21. Bassi said that five families from additional settlements will move to Mavki'im. Ha'aretz reported that the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee decided to delete the punitive clauses in the proposed Evacuation Compensation Bill, which sets out the financial recompense to be offered to settlers who evacuate their homes in the Katif Bloc (Gush Katif) and northern West Bank under the disengagement plan. On Sunday, Yediot reported that following a decision by the Knesset's Constitution, Law and Justice Committee Chairman MK Michael Eitan, the government will be forced to convene in January and notify the Gush Katif settlers six months in advance of the precise evacuation date of their settlements. Ha'aretz reported that approximately 30 Thai workers out of the 400 employed in the Katif Bloc have left the area since last week.

On Sunday, all media quoted Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as saying Saturday that the Palestinians demand a full Israeli withdrawal from the territories, including East Jerusalem, and that they "will not accept settlements, and that includes Ma'aleh Adumim, the Etzion Bloc, and Ariel." Abbas also said that he will not use force against Hamas, that there will be no peace without the release of all jailed Palestinians, including Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti, and that he will follow in Yasser Arafat's footsteps. (Yediot headlined: "Arafat, Model 2005.") However, Abbas said he was extending his hands in peace. FM Silvan Shalom was quoted as saying in an interview with Israel Radio that he is disappointed by Abbas's remarks. All media reported that Sunday the cabinet unanimously approved a series of measures meant to facilitate the elections for PA chairmanship on January 9. Leading media cited international pressure as the reason for these steps. Israel Radio reported that this morning Israel released 159 Palestinian prisoners, in a gesture to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Jerusalem Post reported that some 600 prominent Palestinians have called for an end to armed attacks on Israel and urged the PA to push for democratic reforms. The appeal was made in an open letter to the Palestinian leadership published in Palestinian newspapers on Sunday.

On Sunday, leading media reported that Hamas racked up significant achievements in Thursday's elections for

local councils in the West Bank: out of 26 races, Hamas won seven to nine [sources varied], and Fatah won in 12 local authorities. On Monday, Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday the PA announced the official results of last Thursday's municipal elections, but that it declined to give a breakdown as to how many of the winning candidates belonged to Fatah as opposed to Hamas.

On Sunday, all media reported that following the internal Labor Party elections, MK Ophir Pines-Paz is slated to become interior minister; MK Yitzhak Herzog will get the national infrastructure portfolio; MK Shalom Simhon will be environment minister; and Knesset members Matan Vilnai and Haim Ramon will be ministers without portfolio. Leading media reported that Sunday an interministerial committee approved a bill proposal that would allow Shimon Peres to become PM Sharon's second deputy.

On Friday, Jerusalem Post quoted a senior U.S. administration official as saying that the U.S. is contemplating incursions into Syrian territory in an attempt to kill or capture Iraqi Ba'athists who it believes are directing at least part of the attacks against U.S. targets in Iraq.

Israel Radio quoted senior GOI sources as saying that opponents of the disengagement plan are expected to come to settlements slated for evacuation in order to bolster them. On Sunday, Yediot reported that for the first time a soldier who is a "disengagement objector" has been removed from an officers' training course.

On Sunday, Jerusalem Post reported that the Bush administration is blaming Israel for undermining its sustained diplomatic efforts to persuade Europe not to resume arms sales to China. The newspaper quoted a senior administration official as saying: "Something is going badly wrong in the military relationship" between Israel and the U.S." Jerusalem Post further quoted him as saying that the dispute can now only be resolved "at a high level."

On Friday, Jerusalem Post reported on anti-Israel hate programs being broadcasted on Iranian TV.

Leading media reported that hundreds of settlers from the areas to be evacuated demonstrated Sunday near the Defense Ministry in Tel Aviv, disrupting traffic in the city's center. They were protesting against what they view as the army's lack of response to mortar attacks on Gaza Strip settlements and western Negev communities.

Jerusalem Post reported that IDF soldiers north of the Kissufim crossing in Katif Bloc shot and killed two Palestinians they feared were planning to launch a bombing attack before dawn on Sunday. The media reported that IDF troops killed a deputy of Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades Zakaria Zubeidi commander and three other Fatah militants in Jenin during the weekend.

All media reported that Sunday the Tel Aviv District Court indicted leftist activist Tali Fahima on charges of aiding the enemy in wartime, transmitting information to the enemy, contact with the foreign agent, illegal possession of a firearm, support for a terror group, and contravening a legal order. According to the indictment, Fahima helped operatives of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades evade capture by the IDF by translating a secret IDF document involving an arrest operation for Zubeidi.

Hatzofe cited an interview Yuval Steinitz, the chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, gave to the newspaper of the organization of IDF handicapped, in which he reportedly said that the extensive training of Egyptian forces and the fact that Egypt does not prevent large-scale arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip indicate that Egypt plans to wage war against Israel.

On Sunday, Yediot cited a recommendation by a GOI-appointed committee that Israeli Arabs perform a stint of national service.

Leading media reported that the police arrested nuclear whistleblower Mordecai Vanunu on Christmas Eve, as he attempted to attend the Midnight Mass in Bethlehem.

Ha'aretz reported that two firebombs were thrown early Sunday at the Hassan Bek mosque south of the Tel Aviv beach promenade. The Mosque serves Jaffa's Muslim population.

Ha'aretz reported that the Interior Ministry decided this weekend that children of illegal foreign workers and their families will not be deported over the next

few months, but that they will instead be given visa extensions until March 1.

Jerusalem Post reports that the private Israeli airline Israir expects to earn revenue of USD 25 million from flights from Tel Aviv to New York, which it will resume in late March.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar commented in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The response of the settlers to the intention to evacuate a handful of settlements ... has pulled the thin veneer from the hard nut that is the settlers."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "British Prime Minister Tony Blair's efforts to muster international support for rebuilding the Palestinian Authority are an appropriate form of external intervention."

Oslo skeptic, author Eyal Megged wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "This is a call to all those who insist on making peace now (and I am not blaming anyone, that is not my aspiration), to prepare to turn over a new mental leaf."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Sadly, it appears the taboo on true reconciliation with Israel as a Jewish state with a moral right to exist in this region is still too powerful for even the bravest aspiring Palestinian politician to break."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Right To Uproot and the Right of Return"

Senior op-ed writer Akiya Eldar commented in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 27): "The obsessive highlighting of the danger of the 'rupture in the people' (or the 'unity of the people,' as the Prime Minister put it in his Herzliya speech), transformed the disengagement plan into a dispute between right and left. As if none of this had anything to do with Palestinians, or might have any effect on the situation on the other side of the Green Line.... [Nonetheless,] the disengagement plan has already made an important contribution to peace between Israel and Palestinians. The response of the settlers to the intention to evacuate a handful of settlements in the Gaza Strip, which subsist on Thai labor, and four shriveled settlements in Samaria [the northern West Bank], has pulled the thin veneer from the hard nut that is the settlers. Let every Jewish mother and every Israeli father who are sending their children to defend a settlement know that they have raised them to fight in a war commanded in God's name."

II. "Welcome Intervention"

Ha'aretz editorialized (December 24): "British Prime Minister Tony Blair's efforts to muster international support for rebuilding the Palestinian Authority are an appropriate form of external intervention for the sake of toning down the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and restarting the diplomatic process.... International support is important on several levels: to strengthen the new Palestinian president who will soon be elected, to raise money to finance the PA's activities and economic development in the territories, and to reorganize the Palestinian security services. International support also has domestic importance in helping leaders to take unpopular steps. This has already happened in Israel: Sharon used the letter of commitments that he received in April from U.S. President George W. Bush to help him overcome opposition to the disengagement plan in the Likud and isolate the settlers' lobby.... Sharon acted wisely when he reached an understanding with Blair over the terms of the international conference in London, despite his opposition in principle to Israel's participation in it. He thereby enabled this visit by the leader of a friendly country, who emphasizes his deep commitment to Israel's security at every opportunity, to be crowned with success. Now, the ball is in the Palestinians' court: They will have to do their part and prove that they are able to bring about the necessary changes in the PA."

III. "Turning Over a New Mental Leaf"

Oslo skeptic, author Eyal Megged wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 27): "The reality is that the dream of two countries living side by side in harmony between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is perhaps our dream, but not [the Palestinians']. This dream is nothing but an artificial implant, provided through the generosity of the peace camp.' That is the truth, and it is not wishful thinking, but comes from the mouths of those who have had this dream implanted in them. You cannot help but get the impression that their rejection is not just physical. It is accompanied by revulsion. These words are not being written from a 'right-wing' perspective whose bottom line is 'there is no one to talk to.' Just the opposite: this is a call to all those who insist on making peace now (and I am not blaming anyone, that is not my aspiration), to prepare to turn over a new mental leaf -- at this historical moment. That they think again, that they think differently. Perhaps about a division of a different kind, certainly not one in the form of the false charm known as 'disengagement,' which will only lead us to an impasse. Think about a solution of a different sort, because the good old solution will never be a solution."

IV. "Not Much of A Choice"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 27): "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Sunday stressed how vital it is that Israel be seen throughout the world as facilitating the Palestinian Authority's upcoming election. That is certainly so.... Sharon, however, may be unrealistically optimistic when expecting the election to perhaps produce a peace partner for further road map explorations. There is no denying that the sounds emanating from the Palestinian campaign trail are hardly the sort to instill hope among Israelis.... Even Abbas has openly wrapped himself in Arafat's mantle and gone out of his way to show respect for the terrorists he claims not to support.... Sorely missing from the Palestinian equation is a peace camp, one that need not embrace Israel -- as some Israelis do the Palestinians -- but a party that argues, as our own 'national camp' [the Right] does, that the national interest requires painful concessions.... Sadly, it appears the taboo on true reconciliation with Israel as a Jewish state with a moral right to exist in this region is still too powerful for even the bravest aspiring Palestinian politician to break.... It may emerge that Israel had nothing to gain from the Palestinian elections, or it may be that some of Sharon's purported optimism proves well founded. Would that the latter turns out to be the case. In that light, Sunday's unanimous cabinet approval for pulling out of Palestinian towns and keeping a low profile on the sidelines during the elections is the only sensible move."

12. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Despite the Phalcon affair, Israel insisted on not understanding.... No profit, no matter how much, for the Israeli defense industries is worth a crisis with Israel's main and only ally, the U.S."

Block Quotes:

"It Made Their Blood Boil"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (December 24): "The signals that the Pentagon is sending Israel over the present crisis are sharp and harsh. This is not just a personal crisis of trust between two top officials in the two security establishments.... This is a conflict of substance over the dying spasms of the military-commercial romance between Israel and China -- a romance that began in secret in the early 1980s, with the consent and encouragement of the Americans, and which ended, in practice, with a loud crash and an enormous crisis with the administration with the Phalcon affair in 2000.... Despite the Phalcon affair, Israel insisted on not understanding. The defense industry milieu in Israel is a powerful player with great influence. In addition, the security establishment thought that we were smarter, that our friends in Congress would look out for us, that the

formal definitions would be on our side -- and continued to sell problematic military equipment to China.... The end of the current crisis is clear: Israel will bow to American terms. But perhaps this time, for a change, the security establishment will realize that it has to stop trying to be a wise guy. No profit, no matter how much, for the Israeli defense industries is worth a crisis with Israel's main and only ally, the U.S."

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